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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ABU DHABI 000497

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/21/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PARM](#) [MASS](#) [IR](#) [AE](#)

SUBJECT: MBZ DISCUSSES EXTREMISM WITH CNO

REF: ABU DHABI 460

Classified by Charge d'Affaires Martin Quinn, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ) on April 16, in his first meeting with the U.S. Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), sounded out ADM Gary Roughead on missile defense and commented extensively on his concerns over extremism. The Crown Prince affirmed the UAE's commitment to security cooperation with the United States, emphasizing the need for close communications to prevent Tehran from dividing Washington and Abu Dhabi through provocations. He posited education reform as critical to securing a stable future for the UAE. End summary.

¶2. (S) The CNO expressed gratitude to the UAE for its robust defense cooperation, including hosting hundreds of USN port calls annually and sending Special Operations Forces (SOF) to Afghanistan. Responding to ADM Roughead's observation that enormous changes had happened in the UAE, MbZ noted that "the world has changed" in recent years. Nonetheless, he said, the UAE tried to remain optimistic in an often antiquated cultural environment, citing neighboring Saudi Arabia where "52% of the population can't drive." The UAE had fortunately stayed "one step ahead of the bad guys" due to wise leadership, good allies like the U.S., and luck. "I prefer to be lucky rather than smart" in this area, said MbZ, as one cannot always anticipate emerging surprises. His focus was on securing the UAE "100%."

Bolstering the national defenses  
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¶3. (S) MbZ asked the CNO how he could help the United States. ADM Roughead underscored his commitment to helping the UAE and hailed the Emirates' significant contributions to peace and stability. The CNO thanked MbZ for the UAE's decision to participate in the Maritime Coalition, observing that international solidarity offered the best demonstration to Iran that disruptive behavior was unacceptable. ADM Roughead emphasized that he sought a stable and prosperous environment in the Gulf.

¶4. (S) MbZ affirmed UAE willingness to work with the United States and declared that it was important to bolster communications between Washington and Abu Dhabi. He expressed concern that Iran might resort to provocative behavior. Especially if it acquired nuclear weapons, Tehran might attempt to divide the United States and the UAE. That would be "a day to regret," and the UAE and its armed forces had to be ready for it. In this context, cooperation with the United States was important and, indeed, should deepen.

¶5. (S) MbZ queried the CNO on the strength of Iran's

ballistic missiles. ADM Roughead stated that ballistic missiles were becoming the weapon of choice for blackmail and intimidation, and observed that Iran was unlikely to abandon its missile acquisition program in the foreseeable future. In response, countries needed to build military capabilities to defend themselves. Noting his personal experience commanding AEGIS-equipped warships, the CNO observed that the technology was now mature and, indeed, sufficiently advanced to be adapted on short notice to the unanticipated mission of shooting down a failing satellite. The United States was increasing the number of ships with ballistic missile defense capability. An effective ballistic missile defense in the Gulf would require a structure that linked these systems with shore-based counterparts to provide for earliest possible warning and for timely command and control. This coordination would take some time, the CNO predicted.

¶6. (S) The CNO stressed the importance of contact between young naval personnel from both countries to build trust and familiarity. As one step in this direction, he proposed that USN non-commissioned officers be able to go to sea aboard UAE ships for short periods. The USN hoped to identify opportunities of this sort. The Navy had been in the Gulf for a long time, ADM Roughead commented, and was not going to leave.

¶7. (S) Preparing UAE defenses required modern communications gear and top-flight missile defense systems, emphasized MbZ, who said he could not walk the streets of Abu Dhabi and look into the eyes of its people unless he made every effort to defend the nation. He also noted that Iran would not necessarily retaliate against the aggressor if attacked, but "they will make sure somebody suffers." That reality underpinned his sense of urgency on the defense front,

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because the easiest "somebody" might be the UAE.

¶8. (S) MbZ warned against terrorists "more threatening" than Osama bin Laden (citing a future al-Qaeda, Hamas and Hizballah) as these organizations built capacity and increased technological prowess in cooperation with governments. The Iran - Syria - Hizballah nexus was of particular concern. He worried in particular that these groups might gain access to WMD. It had taken investigators years to identify the perpetrators in the 1992 attack on the Israeli Embassy in Argentina, he lamented, and increased technical expertise on the terrorists' part would only tip the balance further in their favor.

The long-term battle against extremism  
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¶9. (S) MbZ said it was more difficult to "get into the brain" of al-Qaeda than the Taliban, but anyone carrying an AK-47 in Afghanistan is "not on a skiing vacation" and should be dealt with severely. It is a big mistake to take prisoners, offering food and medical care in hopes of gleaning intelligence from them; he did not think there was much intelligence to be gained from the fighters. Furthermore, anyone released after detention may well return to his village or mosque, lay low for a while, but emerge as a "little bin Laden" in five years. Detentions are creating more bin Ladens over the long term.

¶10. (S) As for the Taliban, they represent a backward slide in Islamic teaching to a prior century. MbZ said it is important to study how a more open social environment (characterized by more casual female dress codes) in the 1970s and 80s fell prey to extremist penetration. MbZ places much of the blame on education.

¶11. (S) The UAE Education system was "penetrated by the Muslim Brothers" (MbZ's euphemism for Islamic fundamentalists) in 1967; the UAE Minister of Education from 1972 to 1977 was "recruited from the Muslim Brothers" and

education has been headed in the wrong direction since. Reforming education to focus more on "real knowledge" is a top MbZ priority. He chided a former UAE education and finance minister (Ahmad Humaid al-Tayer) who had spoken the previous day to a crowd of 600 Emiratis at an "Agenda for National Identity Forum" on the need to revive Arabic language and Islamic studies (in a curriculum rapidly shifting to vocational and scientific knowledge). MbZ was particularly concerned that the audience supported the speaker's words. "I'm not worried about my enemy," he added, but about "my people." Freedom of speech and competent media are all founded on strong education, he noted, emphasizing that any possible return to the late 1960s education environment "should worry me."

¶12. (S) MbZ offered an anecdote about the establishment of a high quality private school (Choueifat, run by Lebanese) in a rural area -- many objected to sending their children to the new school. When they saw the quality of education, however, many returned one year later to ask for an additional school to be built to meet growing demand. Residents had seen students in the new school make more progress in one year than others made over many years. When quizzed on their initial hesitation to join the new school, locals said Syrian and Egyptian teachers in the government schools, who were established in the town as respected educators, had told them "the infidel is coming" in the form of the new school. MbZ characterized the education challenge in the UAE as a national security issue. Admiral Roughead agreed that the quality of training for the next generation of military officers and NCOs is also important for both countries, suggesting that exercises be held to allow American sailors to go to sea with Emirati counterparts.

¶13. (S) Another dangerous distortion, according to MbZ, is viewing mosques in the west through the lens of traditional separation of church and state. Imams who do not speak the language of the host community, "in Brighton or San Francisco, for example," will not grasp the history or society around them. A conservative cleric from Saudi Arabia, seeing two men showing affection for one another on the street, might deliver a mosque sermon the following Friday that is straight out of the 13th century. Modern context and tolerance suffer when untrained Imams lead a flock back in time. The "Wahhabis" have spent \$36 billion sending preachers around the world, including into remote parts of the Amazon, said MbZ, describing "Wahhabist penetration" as enemy #1 in the UAE's history. ("We fought them even before we had the oil.") He lamented that if

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extremists succeed in bringing down Egypt or Saudi Arabia, it would only be a matter of time before the neighbors are dragged down too.

¶14. (S) In spite of the threats, MbZ said we cannot let one bad day (incident) make us weak. We must focus on defeating the enemy and make them think twice about attacking us. He felt the UAE had a vision of where it was headed as a nation, pointing to the dangers of other societies with an aging leadership (likely referring to Saudi Arabia).

Trusted allies

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¶15. (S) Stressing again the importance of human ties with trusted allies, MbZ hoped the next generation of UAE nationals "would be better than we are" and would continue to foster relations with the U.S. in order to create an enduring alliance "based on friendship and trust." Admiral Roughead responded that his personal motto has been "the best defense is a true friend."

¶16. (S) More UAE students studying in the U.S. are therefore welcome, MbZ said, lamenting that over a thousand UAE students (30% of the total studying in the U.S.) had returned

from America prematurely after 9/11. He investigated their reasons for returning and found that only 10% identified run-ins with the USG and law enforcement authorities, or family concerns for their safety, as the impetus for their return. The vast majority were simply doing poorly in their studies. He "was shocked" but felt the anecdote confirmed the need to sort out the truth (in this case overblown assumptions about U.S. treatment of Arabs) before drawing sweeping conclusions.

Comment

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¶17. (C) Coming after the CNO's successful day of meetings with the UAE's Chief of Defense and head of navy, MbZ's expansive exchange with the CNO and the duration of the meeting -) twice as long as planned -) underscored the Crown Prince's support for close military cooperation, including in the maritime arena.

¶18. (U) ADM Roughead has cleared this message.  
QUINN